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An investigation of employee attitudes toward promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry

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This study examined employee attitudes toward promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry, focusing on fairness, age, position, and perceptions of Generation Z workers. The objective was to understand how these factors influence satisfaction with promotion processes. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with data collected from 250 hospitality professionals enrolled in a Management Development Program in Nairobi. Participants were selected from randomly chosen 3- to 5-star hotels. The study was grounded in Equity Theory and Psychological Contract Theory. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 26, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings revealed no significant association between job position and satisfaction with promotion practices (χ^2 = 6.95, df = 3, p = 0.0734). However, age had a notable effect satisfaction increased with age, whereas younger professionals (25–40 years) reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction and uncertainty. This suggests a generational gap in expectations, likely driven by younger employees' desire for faster career growth and a lack of clarity regarding promotion pathways. The study recommends implementing transparent, merit-based promotion criteria, strengthening mentorship and career development initiatives for younger staff, addressing generational biases, and conducting regular assessments of employee satisfaction. These measures can enhance trust, motivation, and retention within the hospitality workforce.

Key words: Perception, promotion, opportunities, hospitality, Gen Z.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have shown that perceptions of promotion fairness significantly influence staff morale and retention in the hospitality sector, where employee performance directly affects guest satisfaction (Ayele, 2022). Employees are more motivated and committed to delivering high-quality service when they believe that promotions are merit-based, transparent, and equitable. Therefore, fair and timely promotion practices are essential for maintaining a productive and loyal workforce in the hotel industry.

Promotion decisions are among the most visible and emotionally sensitive aspects of human resource management. In the hospitality sector where service quality relies heavily on motivated and stable personnel employees' perceptions of promotion fairness play a critical role in shaping morale, performance, and turnover intentions.

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Studies by Onyango et al. (2022) found that well-structured promotion systems enhance organizational commitment and retention, whereas perceptions of favoritism or opaque procedures often lead to demotivation and employee turnover.

Ayele (2022) further demonstrated that in Ethiopian hotels, all three dimensions of organizational justice negatively correlated with turnover intention, with procedural justice emerging as the strongest predictor. Similarly, Makokha (2019) reported that employees in Kisumu County who perceived promotion processes as fair showed higher job commitment and were less likely to seek alternative employment.

These findings raise important questions for the industry: *Do employees' age and job position influence their perceptions of promotion fairness? What is the overall level of satisfaction with promotion practices among hospitality employees?*

The present study seeks to address these gaps. According to Dauda (2024), failure to manage promotion expectations can directly contribute to employee attrition and reduced customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, where teamwork and service quality are critical.

Theory guiding the study

The study was anchored in two theories: Equity theory by Adams (1965) and Psychological contract theory by Rousseau (1995). Equity Theory is a motivation theory suggesting that individuals are driven by a sense of fairness in their social and work relationships. It posits that people compare their contributions and rewards to those of others, and if they perceive an imbalance, it can lead to feelings of inequity, potentially affecting motivation and job satisfaction. In this context, a hotel employee may feel unfairly treated and demoralized if a colleague with less experience or lower performance is promoted while they are not. Conversely, equitable and transparent promotion procedures that recognize skill and effort help maintain fairness, foster loyalty, and support sustained high performance. Perceived unfairness may lead to resignations in a high-turnover industry like hospitality, negatively affecting organizational performance, highlighting the need for mitigation (Ahmed and Brown, 2021).

From the perspective of psychological contract theory, the psychological contract reflects how employees and employers perceive their roles beyond the formal job description. It examines what employees contribute, what they receive in return, and how they are treated. Company promotion culture and leadership behavior play a significant role in shaping employee motivation and performance. Rational employees in the hotel industry expect that loyalty, long hours, and hard work will be recognized through promotions. When employers fail to meet these expectations, the psychological contract is perceived as breached, particularly in frontline positions where employees frequently sacrifice personal time for organizational objectives. Such breaches can result in mistrust, resentment, and disengagement. Conversely, honoring these perceived agreements through timely, merit-based promotions strengthens the psychological contract, fostering commitment and long-term retention.

This study therefore emphasizes the importance of inclusive promotion policies that consider performance and potential rather than solely employment tenure. Previous studies have demonstrated that equitable promotion procedures enhance employee motivation, reduce attrition, and reinforce service-oriented cultures in the hospitality industry (Singh and O'Neill, 2022).

Study objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate employee attitudes toward promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry in Kenya. The specific objectives were to:

1) Examine the influence of employee's position on their attitude towards promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry
2) Examine the influence of employee's age on their attitude towards promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry
3) To assess how employees in the hospitality industry perceive Generation Z workers and their potential for promotion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influence of employment position on their attitude towards promotion

Employee perception of promotion opportunities is a key factor in job satisfaction, motivation, and retention, particularly in hierarchical and labor-intensive sectors such as the tourism and hospitality industry. Research increasingly shows that an employee's position within the organizational hierarchy (e.g., operational, supervisory, managerial, or ownership level) significantly shapes how they perceive the fairness, accessibility, and clarity of promotional opportunities.

In a study comparing frontline staff and managers in hotels in North America, Blayney et al. (2021) and Chen and Zhang (2023) found that frontline employees had fewer prospects for growth compared to their managerial counterparts. This divergence was attributed to variations in information availability, participation in decision-making, and visibility of internal job opportunities. Similarly, Ismanto et al. (2024) found that employees in managerial and supervisory positions expressed more positive perceptions of promotion procedures. Their research highlighted the role of servant leadership in shaping fair perceptions of promotions, particularly for those already

in leadership positions.

Azimi et al. (2025), in their assessment of employer branding and internal mobility in the hospitality sector, provided additional support for Ismanto et al.'s (2024) findings. They observed that operational-level employees often lacked clarity regarding career paths, which undermined their perception of promotion fairness and attainability. In contrast, structured communication and performance evaluation systems positively reinforce promotion expectations for supervisors and managers when implemented effectively.

Sitati et al. (2021) examined career development in the Kenyan hotel industry and found that perceptions of promotion were strongly linked to job rank, with lower-level employees expressing dissatisfaction due to perceived favoritism and limited upward mobility. These findings confirm a persistent disparity in perceived promotion equity, particularly among younger employees.

Likewise, employees in higher-level positions were more likely to be satisfied with promotion processes, a perception influenced by both internal HR policies and external labor market conditions. During periods of high turnover and labor shortages, supervisory and managerial personnel expressed increased optimism regarding promotion opportunities, whereas frontline employees remained skeptical. Overall, these findings indicate a strong relationship between employee position and perceptions of promotion, with higher-ranking employees exhibiting more positive attitudes due to structural advantages, access to professional networks, and improved organizational communication.

In contrast, operational-level employees regularly face uncertainty, limited participation in decision-making and unclear progression standards, all of which undermine their confidence in fair promotion. Employee perceptions of career advancement in Kenya's tourism and hospitality sector are heavily shaped by their position within the organizational hierarchy. According to Sitati et al. (2021), employees in operational roles such as cleaners, waiters, and kitchen assistants often perceive promotions as biased, based on favoritism or personal relationships rather than merit. Their study, which examined employee motivation and career advancement in Kenyan hotels, found that frontline employees were frustrated by unclear promotion procedures, limited access to training, and a lack of transparent evaluation mechanisms.

Conversely, supervisory and managerial employees reported higher levels of satisfaction with promotional opportunities. This disparity was attributed to their closer proximity to decision-makers, better access to professional development resources, and greater participation in performance evaluations. Muriithi and Gachambi (2020) corroborated these findings in their study of hotel employee retention in Nairobi, observing that employees in supervisory and management roles had clearer expectations and greater confidence in the fairness of promotion processes compared to operational-level staff.

Furthermore, Mutune and Kimosop (2019) noted that promotion in Kenya's hospitality sector frequently lacks formal structure, resulting in irregularities that disproportionately affect junior staff. Their research on internal promotions in Mombasa tourism enterprises found that firm owners and top managers often made unilateral promotion decisions without input from HR or adherence to established criteria. Consequently, lower-level employees frequently felt demotivated, perceiving advancement as unattainable without support from internal alliances.

The problem is further exacerbated in family-owned or small hospitality enterprises, which dominate the Kenyan tourism industry. According to Kang'ethe and Wanjiku (2023), such establishments rarely promote employees based on performance or qualifications. Instead, position level significantly impacts access to opportunities, with top-level employees benefiting from informal advantages unavailable to operational staff. This reinforces the perception that promotions are reserved for insiders, limiting motivation and career aspirations at lower levels.

Moreover, young employees, particularly Generation Z who constitute the majority of Kenya's tourism workforce place a high value on clear career paths. Omondi and Mwangi (2022) found that young operational staff is highly dissatisfied with promotion procedures that lack transparency and fairness, contributing to elevated turnover rates. These findings underscore the need for more structured and transparent promotion frameworks, especially in operationally intensive areas such as hotel front offices, restaurants, and cleaning services.

Influence of employee's age on their perception on promotion

According to Giousmpasoglou (2024), younger employees particularly those under 35 in hospitality professions often perceive promotions as less attainable due to limited experience and hierarchical constraints. Their study in the UK hotel sector indicated that younger staff frequently feels overlooked for advancement despite possessing the necessary education, leading to dissatisfaction and high turnover. In contrast, older employees (typically over 40) may view promotion prospects as less relevant, especially if they have reached a career plateau or prioritize work-life balance over rapid advancement (Chang et al., 2024). Such employees often value job stability and recognition more than fast-tracked career growth, suggesting that attitudes toward promotion vary with life stage as well as work context.

Deery and Jago (2015) also observed that mid-career employees (ages 30 to 45) are particularly sensitive to transparent promotion plans, as they often balance ambition with family or financial responsibilities. Inconsistencies in promotional procedures may lead this group to disengage or seek opportunities in better-structured

organizations.

Surveys in Kenya's hospitality sector indicate similar trends: younger employees, particularly Generation Z and millennials, are more frustrated with promotion processes. Omondi and Mwangi (2022) found that young hospitality staff in Nairobi and Mombasa were concerned about favoritism, poor communication, and a lack of mentorship, all of which undermined their confidence in fair promotion. Consequently, younger workers frequently perceive promotions as unpredictable or politically influenced.

Sitati et al. (2021) reported that older employees, especially those in supervisory roles, tend to view promotion systems more favorably, citing experience-based advancement and closer relationships with decision-makers. However, the study also noted that the absence of formal succession planning limits upward mobility for both younger and senior employees, particularly in small or family-owned enterprises. Kang'ethe and Wanjiku (2023) further observed that, in many Kenyan tourism businesses, age is sometimes implicitly associated with perceived loyalty and trustworthiness, with older personnel favored for leadership positions. This practice can generate resentment among younger employees, who may feel overlooked despite their technical skills or educational qualifications.

Employees perceptions of generation Z regarding promotion

Intergenerational relations in the workplace have become increasingly important as Generation Z, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, enters the workforce. Regarding promotions, older generations such as Baby Boomers and Generation X often hold conflicting views about Gen Z, particularly concerning their work ethic, professional expectations, and readiness for advancement. Recent research suggests that older employees frequently perceive Generation Z as promotion-hungry but lacking the patience or tenure traditionally associated with career development (Jones and Thompson, 2022). This perception reflects generational differences: older workers tend to value loyalty and long-term commitment, whereas Generation Z favors rapid advancement, meaningful work, and feedback-driven environments (Nguyen et al., 2023).

In the hotel industry, where hierarchical promotion paths and experience-based development are common, older managers may hesitate to promote Gen Z employees quickly, believing they need more time to "mature" professionally (Andrews and Kim, 2021). Such generational biases can create tension, particularly in fast-paced sectors like hotels and restaurants, where Gen Z staff often bring strong digital and service skills.

Moreover, intergenerational stereotypes may influence management decisions. Research indicates that older generations sometimes view Gen Z as overly reliant on technology, lacking resilience, or being too informal factors that can affect promotion opportunities (Lopez and Carter, 2022). However, these perceptions often overlook Gen Z's unique strengths, such as adaptability, digital fluency, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Roberts et al. (2021), note that unconscious age-related biases can lead to unfair assessments during promotion decisions. Without clear and standardized evaluation procedures, generational attitudes may unintentionally influence who is considered "ready" for leadership roles. To address this gap, experts recommend fostering intergenerational understanding, implementing mentorship programs, and establishing performance-based promotion systems that prioritize competencies over tenure or age (Singh and Patel, 2023).

Older generations in Kenya often perceive Generation Z as lacking the patience and loyalty traditionally associated with career progression. Differences in work ideals and expectations shape these perspectives. While Baby Boomers and Generation X may view promotions as the result of long-term dedication and incremental growth, Generation Z prioritizes rapid advancement, innovation, and purpose-driven work (Maina, 2021). Despite their technological proficiency and adaptability, older managers frequently question Generation Z's readiness for leadership roles due to this disparity.

Moreover, generational stereotypes can influence promotion decisions in Kenyan firms, reinforcing age-related biases (Ochieng and Otieno, 2020). Understanding these perceptions is critical for achieving intergenerational equity and fostering workplace collaboration. Generation Z often perceives older employees as placing excessive emphasis on tenure and age rather than performance or innovation. They believe promotions should be based on competence, creativity, and results not merely years of service (Wambua and Mutua, 2022). Older personnel are often seen as less adaptable to new technologies and modern work practices, creating tension in industries undergoing digital transformation, where Gen Z may feel their contributions are undervalued by senior decision-makers (Odhiambo, 2021).

Some Generation Z employees in Kenya perceive that senior supervisors frequently prioritize personal relationships and long-standing networks over transparent promotion processes. This perception leads to dissatisfaction among young professionals who seek fairness and merit-based recognition. Many Generation Z workers express a desire for mentorship from older colleagues but view traditional leadership approaches as restrictive. They frequently seek career development discussions that emphasize work-life balance, personal growth, and social impact, rather than focusing solely on pay and job title (Mutua and Kilonzo, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected from 250 participants attending a Management

Development Program at a tourism and hospitality training institute in Nairobi. These participants were drawn from 3- to 5-star hotels that were randomly selected.

The inclusion criterion for participation was holding a supervisory, management, or divisional head position. Participants came from different regions of the country, making them a representative sample of the population. There were no additional conditions for participation in the training, which may have introduced some biases. These participants constituted the target population of the study.

Quantitative data were collected using researcher-administered questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through group discussions and interviews. The questionnaires were pilot-tested prior to full data collection. Nominal and ordinal data were collected for each research objective. Descriptive statistics were analyzed using frequencies, and the Chi-square test of independence was employed to assess associations and correlations. SPSS version 26 was used for data analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using content and thematic analysis.

Respondents were informed that completion of the questionnaires was voluntary, and all information collected would be kept confidential. While the sampling procedures and sample size imposed certain limitations and may have introduced some bias, the findings are considered representative of the target population.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent profile

Out of a total of 172 responses, 167 were valid, while 5 were either missing or incomplete. Of the 167 valid responses, 119 (71.3%) came from accommodation establishments, such as hotels, lodges, or guesthouses. This indicates that the majority of participants in the survey were from the accommodation sector. About 21 respondents (12.6%) were from travel and tour companies, while a smaller group of respondents, 27 (16.2%), and were from restaurants. These respondents worked in the food service industry, such as cafes or dining establishments.

A Chi-square Goodness of Fit test was conducted to determine whether the distribution of establishment types (Accommodation, Travel and Tours, and Restaurants) differed significantly from an equal distribution. The results indicated a significant deviation from the expected frequencies, $\chi 2$ (2, N=167) = 106.27, $p < 0.001$. This suggested that the types of establishments represented in the study were not equally distributed. Specifically, hotels were overrepresented, while Travel and Tours and Restaurants were underrepresented relative to an equal distribution.

A majority of respondents (58.4%) held operational-level positions, compared to 15.1% in supervisory roles. Additionally, 22.9% were in management positions, and a minority (3.6%) were business or organizational owners. The data indicates that most respondents were from operational levels, with fewer individuals in supervisory, managerial, or ownership roles. This skewed distribution of roles may have influenced perceptions of promotion, authority, and career growth within the sample.

A Chi-square Goodness of Fit test was conducted to examine whether these role categories were equally represented. The test revealed a statistically significant difference from a uniform distribution: $\chi 2$ (3, N=166) = 113.22, $p < 0001$. This means that the observed distribution of positions was not equal, with a significant overrepresentation of operational roles.

Out of 167 valid respondents, most employees (62%) had been in their current position for 1 to 5 years, while 30.1% had been in their position for 5 to 10 years. Only 7.2% had been in their position for 10 to 15 years, and a minority (0.6%) had been in their position for less than a year. The high number of individuals (approximately 92%) who have stayed in one role for 1 to 10 years may indicate slow career progression or limited promotion opportunities, depending on the company structure. Since most workers have remained in one position for several years, it may suggest that opportunities for promotion and advancement are limited.

Influence of respondents' position on their attitude towards promotion

A cross-tabulation was conducted to explore the relationship between respondents' job positions and their satisfaction with promotion. This analysis aimed to understand how promotion satisfaction varied across different levels of the organizational hierarchy. Management and owners reported the highest satisfaction levels (over 80%), while operational and supervisory staff reported lower satisfaction, around 65%. This suggests that lower-tier employees particularly Generation Z, who often occupies operational roles felt excluded or unfairly treated in promotion processes compared to their supervisors and managers. These findings highlight the importance of examining perceived fairness and transparency in promotion criteria, generational attitudes toward career advancement, and why Generation Z employees may feel under-supported or unrecognized within promotion systems (Figure 1).

This trend suggests that satisfaction with promotion increases with position level, possibly due to greater access to advancement opportunities and decision-making power. To determine whether these findings were statistically significant, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted. The results indicated no statistically significant association between an employee's position in the company and their satisfaction with promotion (χ^2 = 6.95, df = 3, $p = 0.0734$) at the 5% significance level.

The cross-tabulation between respondents' positions and their willingness to leave the company for a promotion elsewhere revealed that supervisory staff were the most likely to consider leaving (nearly 70%), possibly due to ambition and a desire for faster career progression, which may feel blocked internally. Management-level respondents also showed high mobility and dissatisfaction (65%), suggesting they would consider leaving for higher-level executive roles or better compensation. Operational-level



Figure 1. Satisfaction with promotion opportunities in the firm.

employees, the largest group, demonstrated moderate willingness to leave (58.5%), perhaps driven by job dissatisfaction or better opportunities elsewhere. Interestingly, company owners were evenly split, with 50% indicating they might leave likely hypothetically, given that their mobility is tied to ownership rather than employment, suggesting the question may not have been fully applicable to them.

Overall, employees at all levels expressed a willingness to leave for promotion opportunities elsewhere, with supervisors and managers being at the highest risk of turnover. This highlights the importance of implementing clear internal growth paths and career advancement strategies to retain mid-level leadership talent and reduce potential loss of key personnel.

Influence of employee's age on their perception of promotion

Respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with the promotion process in their company. Out of 158 valid responses, the majority (70.3%) reported being satisfied, while 47 respondents (29.7%) were not satisfied. Further analysis by age group showed that respondents aged 25 to 30 and 30 to 40 years reported the highest levels of satisfaction, with 38 and 46 individuals satisfied, respectively. These two age brackets accounted for 78.5% of all satisfied respondents. Among the 13 respondents under 20 years, only 8 (61.5%) were satisfied, while 5 (38.5%) were dissatisfied the highest dissatisfaction rate across all age groups. For respondents over 50 years (n = 2), both were satisfied (100%). Overall, the proportion of dissatisfaction was higher among younger respondents and appeared to decrease with age. It was also observed that satisfaction with the current position at work generally increased with age.

Younger professionals (25 to 40 years) reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction and uncertainty, suggesting challenges such as unmet career expectations, unclear progression paths, or role misalignment. In contrast, older respondents (40+) exhibited higher satisfaction, likely due to greater job security, experience, or acceptance of their career stage. Correlation analysis showed very weak negative relationships between age and satisfaction, with Pearson's r = –0.066 and Spearman's rho = –0.061. The corresponding p-values (0.408 and 0.446) were above the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the correlations were not statistically significant. This implies that there was no meaningful or reliable association between a respondent's age and their satisfaction with their current job position.

Influence of age and employees' level of desperation

A cross-tabulation between respondents' age and the statement, "*I am ready to quit my job if I received a promotion in another company,*" revealed notable patterns. Overall, 60.5% of respondents indicated they were willing to leave their current job for a promotion elsewhere. Willingness to quit increased with age, peaking among respondents aged 40–50 years, where 69.6% expressed readiness to leave (Figure 2). Young employees (<20 years) were more hesitant to leave their company, with 60% indicating they were not ready, possibly due to inexperience or a desire for job security. Those aged 25 to 40 years showed a stronger openness to job mobility, reflecting motivation for career growth. Mid-career employees (25 to 50 years) were more likely to leave their jobs for a promotion elsewhere, highlighting the importance of internal advancement opportunities to retain talent in this group. Willingness to quit for promotion increased with age up to 50, suggesting greater confidence in their skills, higher opportunity costs of remaining in a stagnant position, and a stronger desire for

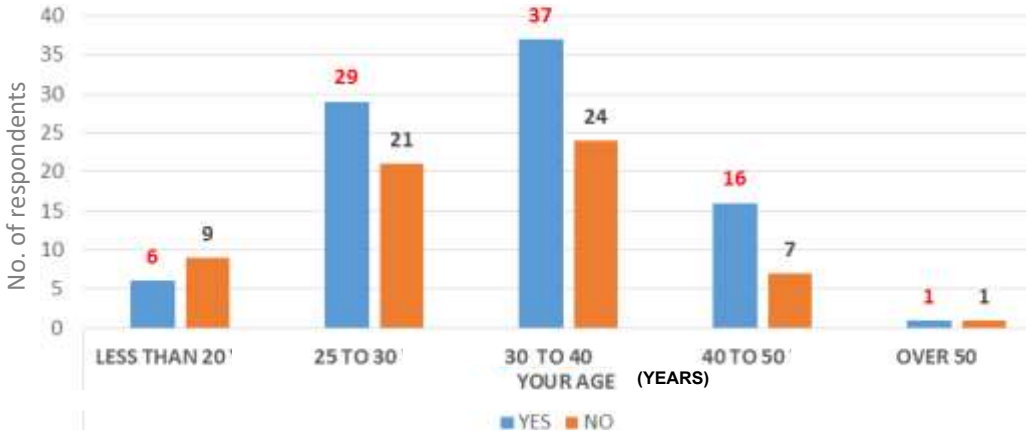


Figure 2. Willingness to quit your job for promotion.

meaningful advancement.

A cross-tabulation between respondents' age and the statement, "*I feel that my promotion is far overdue*," revealed how promotion dissatisfaction varied across age groups. Employees aged 25 to 30 expressed the highest level of dissatisfaction, with 59.2% feeling their promotion was overdue. This finding aligned with interview responses.

Respondents aged 30 to 40, despite being the largest group, were generally more content, with 61.5% stating their promotion was not overdue. Those under 20 were largely awaiting their first promotion (only 26.7% felt overdue), reflecting their early career stage. Respondents aged 40 to 50 showed relatively high dissatisfaction (56.5%), likely feeling stalled in career progression, while those over 50 expressed no concern about overdue promotions, suggesting they had settled in their career paths or had no expectation of further advancement.

The Pearson Chi-Square test for association between age and perceived promotion delay yielded $p = 0.042$. Since this value is less than 0.05, it indicates a statistically significant association between respondents' age and their perception of promotion delays.

Perception of older generations towards generation Z on promotion

This question examined career progression and promotion dynamics among employees in Kenya's hospitality and tourism sectors, with a focus on Generation Z and how their perceptions compare to global trends. The findings revealed a workforce largely concentrated at the operational level, with many employees remaining in the same position for up to 10 years without substantial promotions. While a significant majority (86.5%) had experienced promotions in the last five years, the low number of respondents in managerial or ownership roles suggests that these promotions are often horizontal or offer limited impact on career growth. For Generation Z, who prioritizes rapid advancement, skill recognition, and meaningful work, these trends may contribute to perceptions of stagnation, inequity, or generational gatekeeping by older leadership. Compared to global counterparts operating in more fluid, skill-based and decentralized promotion environments, Kenyan Gen Z employees viewed the current system as rigid and outdated. This generational disconnect could lead to growing frustration, reduced engagement, and increased attrition among young professionals, particularly in an era where digital work, entrepreneurship, and migration offer alternative paths to advancement.

To assess age-related perceptions of promotion impatience, respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement, "The young generation is not patient in getting a promotion." Agreement ranged from 50% among those under 20 years to 100% among respondents over 50 years. A substantial portion of respondents under 30 also agreed, suggesting that even younger employees recognized impatience within their cohort. Respondents aged 40 and above overwhelmingly agreed, highlighting a generational perception gap regarding promotion expectations and workplace patience. Both Pearson's R and Spearman's rho indicated a weak negative correlation between age and this perception. The negative direction suggests that as age increases, agreement with the statement slightly rises, consistent with patterns observed in the cross-tabulation. However, the p-values (0.127 and 0.097) indicate that these correlations are not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level.

Perceptions of young generation's capability for management roles by age

To evaluate how respondents from different age groups perceive the responsibility and capability of the young generation to assume management duties, 81.8% of all

respondents believed that young employees are capable and responsible enough for such roles. Agreement was high across all age groups, including older respondents: 75% of those aged 40 to 50 and 100% of those over 50 (noting the small sample of 2). The 25 to 30 age group showed the highest support at 88.9%, indicating strong confidence among peers.

Both younger respondents (<30) and older respondents (>50) expressed strong trust in the abilities of the young generation to lead, with only modest scepticism observed among middle-aged brackets. Overall, there was broad consensus that the young generation is capable of assuming leadership and management responsibilities, reflecting intergenerational optimism regarding youth leadership potential in the workplace. Correlation tests were conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant association between age and the belief that young employees are responsible and capable of handling management duties. Both correlation coefficients were positive but very weak, suggesting that agreement slightly increases with age, but the relationship is minimal. This finding aligns with sentiments expressed in interviews. The p-values (Pearson: 0.419, Spearman: 0.200) were well above the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the correlations are not statistically significant.

In conclusion, the belief that the young generation is capable of management duties was consistently high across age groups, with no statistically significant variation by age.

Perceptions of youth willingness to be groomed by their supervisors

They sought to examine whether youth were willing to be mentored by their supervisors, who belonged to various age groups. Overall, 45% of respondents believed that youth are not willing to be mentored by their supervisors, while 55% disagreed with this view. The youngest group of respondents (<20 years) strongly refuted the statement that “youth are not willing to be mentored by their supervisors,” with only 7.1% agreeing, suggesting that they see themselves as eager to learn. As age increased, agreement with the statement also increased, peaking at 54.2% in the 40 to 50 age group. This trend reflects a generational perception gap: younger individuals see themselves as open to mentorship, while older respondents are more skeptical of youth’s willingness. The data reveals a generational divide in perceptions of youth's openness to mentorship.

To evaluate the strength and significance of the relationship between respondents' age and their perception that youth are unwilling to be mentored by supervisors, the findings showed that both Pearson's and Spearman's correlations were negative, indicating that as age increases, the likelihood of agreeing with the statement that "youth are not willing to be mentored" also increases. The correlation was weak, but statistically significant, meaning the relationship exists but is not strong. Pearson's $p = 0.026$ and Spearman's $p = 0.041$, both of which are < 0.05, confirm that the relationship is unlikely to be due to chance. There was a hierarchical trend in the statement regarding whether youth were willing to be mentored by their supervisors. As seniority increased, so did the likelihood of agreeing that youth were unwilling to be mentored. This suggests that leaders and decision-makers (managers, owners) were less open and ready to accept younger workers, while those interacting more closely with youth (supervisors, operational staff) were more balanced and optimistic.

Implications of the findings

There are several important implications from the study findings. Mid-career employees and younger professionals are at higher risk of leaving if promotion pathways remain unclear or blocked. Misaligned expectations regarding patience and readiness for leadership may undermine collaboration and mentorship. Despite perceptions of impatience, the younger generation is widely regarded as capable and ready to lead, indicating a strategic opportunity for grooming new talent. Differing perceptions of mentorship willingness can hinder leadership development unless proactively addressed.

Conclusion

The study reveals that age significantly influences perceptions of promotion, career satisfaction, and mentorship dynamics in Kenya’s hospitality and tourism sector. While youth are seen as capable and eager for leadership, they face generational skepticism and perceived delays in progression, which contribute to dissatisfaction and increased turnover risk. A disconnect between senior leaders and younger employees, particularly regarding ambition and mentorship, highlights the need for improved communication and structured career pathways. Despite generational tensions, there is a shared belief in youth potential, offering a strong foundation for leadership development if adequately supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Develop clear, merit-based promotion criteria to reduce dissatisfaction and uncertainty, particularly among younger staff.
2) Implement tailored career development programs for the 25–50 age group to prevent stagnation and reduce turnover risk.
3) Introduce structured, two-way mentorship programs that foster mutual respect and understanding between younger

and older employees.
4) Fast-track high-performing young professionals into leadership roles, supported by training and rotational leadership exposure.
5) Regularly audit promotion decisions to ensure fairness across age groups and strengthen organizational trust.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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